

AVALON

MISSOURI SOUTHERN'S LITERARY MAGAZINE

Missouri Southern State College,
Joplin, MO 64801-1595



FICTION

Almost Paradise

By Martin C. Oetting

Everyone Has a Darin in Their Neighborhood . . . Don't They?

By Tom Bartkowiak

POETRY

JoAnn Hollis	Melody Cundiff	Curtis Steere
Dr. Vernon Peterson	Ron Todd	Susan Stone

GALLERY

Eddy Gilbert	Annabelle Seelye
--------------	------------------

AVALON

Missouri Southern's Literary Magazine



AVALON is published monthly by Missouri Southern's Communications Department.

Simon P. McCaffery
Editor

Martin C. Oetting
Layout & Design
Consultant

Chad D. Stebbins
Adviser

Angela McCaffery
Typesetting

Connie Foglesong
The Copymachine!

All materials (fiction, essays, letters, poetry, art, photography and mixed-media) to be submitted should be delivered or mailed to **The Chart** Office, located in Room 117 of Hearn Hall. Phone is 624-8100, extension 228.

If material is mailed, it should include a self-addressed, stamped envelope for return of material, if desired. AVALON takes no responsibility for material submitted. Please do not send the originals.

AVALON claims no rights of any kind pertaining to work appearing in the publication.



Editor's Notes

By Simon P. McCaffery

And who shall dwell?

Welcome back! Our spring semester is under way, and, at the time of this writing, with unseasonably spring-like weather! If snow is falling again by the time you are reading this column, at least we will have had a short slice of fairer weather to come, a spur to keep us moving.

This fourth edition of AVALON bears a newer face, and (hopefully) a better overall look. It has taken time, but this little monthly is finally gelling into some final (for now) shape. Ultimately, a publication should never reach a static point. Slow change and evolution should run its course with everything.

Inside you will discover some new things. Our lead story, *Almost Paradise*, is Marty "C." Oetting's definitive look at the simple, yet dream-ridden life of two hobos of the 1960's. In my mind, this narrative displays a unique scope for the reader—the author successfully projects the character's personal view of a private world. Their outlook of the rail-veined world takes on a mystical quality that I very much enjoyed, and hope you will also.

Another first is the use of photography to illustrate a short story, something I hope will continue on occasion. Mixing established medias can be very productive, like blending two or more arts for a different texture. From this issue forward,

photography will appear both in the text to illustrate, as well as appearing in the new GALLERY section. The GALLERY section will be at least two full pages of either art work or photography by one or more artists. Why not give them their own section as well?

Also inside is the short humor piece, *Everyone Has a Darin in Their Neighborhood*. . . *Don't They?*, by Tom Bartkowiak. Tom has promised me that he will dig up more of his Darin pieces so we can get better acquainted with the guy. There was one in my neighborhood, alright.

Besides being a time for fairer weather and softball games, spring marks the appearance of the *The Winged Lion*, Missouri Southern's premiere creative writing publication. As I understand it, work on this year's edition will commence in about a month, but submissions are already welcome! The *Winged Lion* is a superb publication, and anyone who writes, sketches, paints or shoots film should make an effort to submit everything they can. The deadline for entries is not until March, so there is no lack of time, no matter the project. Even the material submitted and/or published in these pages should be submitted to the *Winged Lion*. It is a different sort of publication, certainly more at-

tractive in stock and appearance and with a longer, richer tradition (and I have something to say about *this* magazine later). I can still remember how proud and excited I was to get a poem published in the *Lion*. Hey folks, it's not *Harpers* or *The Atlantic*, but it's read by a lot of people, okay? And it's something that you will have with you for a long time. It is a professional publication. So submit, you bums. You aren't a writer unless someone besides your socks get to read the stuff. The same goes for other artists. Anyone afraid of criticism and exposure is afraid of growth.

Now, the *real* sermon. I will be graduating from Southern in May of this year, and after all the dreaming and glue on my fingers, who is going to take over the editing and publication of AVALON in the future years? 1985 was a great year of diversification and strength for this school's publications. This year will continue that growth, but we must look ahead to make sure that we do not stumble or spend our momentum. AVALON is the first monthly literary magazine the school has ever had, and I believe it deserves a long life. This publication is still in its infancy, or maybe torrid adolescence, but in any case, I dearly hope that it survives my departure from this college.

Preparing your manuscripts: Part 2

In this last installment of "helpful hints" for preparing a manuscript that most magazine editors approve of, we will talk about general appearance, shipping, and the slush pile.

Once you have your manuscript in its final draft, with all the polish and rewrites completed, it should be made ready for the mail and its final destination.

You should know the publication you intend to submit it too, indeed, the story should have been targeted for it from the beginning. This is not to say that stories do not end up being

published in magazines other than those intended—it just helps to target your work from its conception. If you wish to see your work in print, you should:

■ Read the particular magazine. Know what particular style or genres of fiction and/or poetry they accept. Pay attention to narrative styles, subject matter and length (of course, none of these should determine your style).

■ Know the editor to which your manuscript should be sent. This will save time and hassles for both parties.

■ Be familiar with when the

magazine accepts material (assuming of course that they do accept unsolicited work), the length, and when they pay. *Writer's Digest* magazine regularly features articles ("Fiction 50") that give vast amounts of useful information regarding the hundreds of magazines around.

When you are ready to mail your manuscript, do not use staples or clear folders or tape to bind it. Just place it loose, in order, inside a 8½ by 11½ manilla envelope. Include a smaller manilla with your return address and the proper return

postage. Remember, send a good photocopy, not your only original! You might send a brief note to the editor saying, "Not being seen elsewhere," as well.

Then wait. Your story must first laungish in the Slush Pile, that pile of unsolicited manuscripts, waiting to be read and considered. Slush piles are dangerous and sinister places. The people reading material from them are often in a hurry, as the pile is always growing. But if your piece is captivating enough to draw their attention, then you've got a chance.



Almost Paradise

By Martin C. Oetting

SUNRISE was silent, swift, and seductive. Bouncy pulled the crumpled newspaper from his face and gazed up into the bright light. He could hear the birds in the nearby sewage ditch chirp and flutter about in the fresh morning air. Picking himself up, he stumbled over to the rusting hulk of a boxcar he called home. Thin cardboard and paper rustled in the breeze and bounced across the railroad tracks as he called to his partner, Sammy.

"Git 'er up and at 'em" he called as he peered through the open sliding door into the dark shadows of the boxcar. A flying beer can gave him indication that Sammy had heard, and he retreated to an old slab of oak fixing to prepare a gourmet breakfast.

Sammy lowered himself from the car, straightened his faded jean jacket, and joined Bouncy on the oak slab.

"Bright mornin' for travlin," Sammy quipped. He pulled out an old copy of the Bible, systematically arranged a pile of soiled tobacco and rolling papers on it, and proceeded to roll cigarettes for the morning. Bouncy gathered paper and twigs from among the oily ties piled near the tracks, arranged them on a sheet of rusted tin, and lit the pile with a beaten lighter. Alternating bursts of rum-infested breath and air blasts from a folded newspaper, he soon had a crisp fire. He leaned back and watched Sammy rolling cigarettes. Neither man said a word for what seemed like an hour.

The silence was rudely interrupted by a distant blast of a diesel air horn. Both

men turned to watch the approaching train. For them, it was a sign of freedom, a passage to the world. The trains were their gods, and the silvery rails a path to heaven. Thus it was for a hobo in the 1960's.

Texarkana had been good to them. They had found others in their subculture, and had found plenty to eat and drink. Memories of late night campfires, tales of the railroads, and near-misses with the law stirred in their minds as they watched their friends perched in the open doorways of the passing train. Then, as if to awaken them from a pleasing dream, the caboose rattled by and faded into the distance; headed towards that paradise so prized by hobo types.

"Hope they make 'er," Bouncy said. "Gonna be a long string o' nights 'fore they see green grass like we had 'ere."

Sammy nodded in agreement and watched the breeze ruffle the weeds in a nearby field. The hobos sat. The fire crackled. Sammy lit a cigarette.

"S'pose we oughta be gitten outa here, too, ya reckon?"

Almost bewildered at what he had said, Sammy stared at his partner waiting for a response. Bouncy sat like a rock and watched the fire. Small wisps of white smoke curled up from the flames and ducked under the brow of his weathered hat. He looked like a Santa Claus whose warranty had expired months ago, with his round belly expanding and contracting with each breath he took. He reached up to scratch his stubbles and squinted his eyes from the irritating smoke.

"Yep," he said. "it be time we rattle on."

It had been said so many times before. Things had gone wrong, and friends had attempted to talk them into leaving; but they liked Texarkana. They often dreamed of that hobo paradise known in their circles as 'Leroy's town.' They heard stories from others about the miles upon miles of railroad yards, and of some unusually tall building known as the Sears Tower. And they heard about bands of fifty hobos setting up camp, living off plentiful grains which slipped from the idle hopper cars. So many times, they had come close to leaving; but they stayed.

Sammy pulled a rusted pocket watch from his soiled trousers, and stared into the face. This was his prize possession. Apparently dropped from a passing train by an engineer near retirement, Sammy had found it buried beneath the chat ballast near the tracks one day. It was still ticking, ticking away the time he knew he was wasting in getting to paradise.

"Next 'un be comin' by in 'af an hour," Bouncy said. He watched a switch engine down in the yard shuffling cars, pushing in, pulling out, revving, idling. He looked at Sammy and smiled.

"We could really do 'er this time," he said. "Train's gonna stop right 'bout ere. What da ya thinks?"

Sammy just sat and puffed at his cigarette. He knew in his heart they were to leave today, he could feel it in the wind. He thought of his friends who were miles away by now, and wondered what they were thinking. He wanted to be there, too.

"Reckon we oughta git our grubbs

t'gether an pace 'er," Sammy said as he eyed a knap sack nearby.

The men got up and gathered their belongings. It was almost systematic, yet it was a paramount decision for them. Bouncy grabbed an old olive-green knap sack, looped it over his shoulder, and stomped out the fire. A sudden gust of wind caught his shirt and nearly blew off his hat. He knew the wind was talking to him, pushing him, begging him to travel on.

Meanwhile, a distant rumble signaled an approaching train. The hobos stalked through the waving green weeds and poised to watch the action, as they had done so many times before. The blue and white Missouri Pacific diesels grumbled by, engineers peering into the blinding sunrise ahead. The hobos listened to the screeching, jolting squeaks of the passing train. The couplers knocked in rhythm, and the train slowed to a stop waiting for a green signal to proceed. Now was the time.

Sammy looked over the array of railroad cars appearing before him. There were three tank cars—impossible for a hobo to conquer. A flat car loaded with lumber would be easy to mount, but exposure to the elements would be hard to tolerate. Then, his eyes were drawn to a Georgia Pacific boxcar with open doors. A fifty-yard trek lay between him and paradise. He began to walk.

"Wait, wait you 'ole gruffy," Bouncy said. "I ain't sure it's the right 'un."

"Sure it is," Sammy said. "Cmon 'fore she rolls again."

As if the train had heard his words, the boxcar began to creak and groan as the shiny silver wheels began to slowly roll down the rails. Sammy knew it was now or never.

"Ifn you ain't a comin, I go without cha," he said as he picked up his pace towards the rolling train. Bouncy watched in disbelief as his lifelong friend threw his knapsack up into the car and climbed aboard. The sounds of the moving train mixed in with his memories of Texarkana and his friends. They were all gone now—gone to that paradise he so dearly longed for. As if possessed by a rambling demon, he bolted for the car. Sammy encouraged him.

"C'mon, git that belly on board."

Sammy reached down, grabbed Bouncy's knapsack, and threw it blindly over his shoulder. He grabbed Bouncy's hand and pulled him up.

"See, twasn't that hard," Sammy said. "We on our way ta paradise, goin' ta see Leroy."

THE BOXCAR ROCKED and swayed rhythmically to the click-clack of the rails. Bouncy had found a nice pile of straw in one corner to settle in, and was in a state of deep sleep. His wilted hat was pulled



down over his face, and he rested his clasped hands on his round belly. Sammy sat against the beaten wood side of the boxcar interior, chewing on a piece of straw and contemplating what paradise would hold for him and his friend. He glanced at his watch, and paced the telephone poles whizzing by outside the cracked door.

"Reckon we goin' near sixty," he thought. "Oughtta be dere soon."

Sammy's eyelids began to fall over his tired eyes. The rhythm of the train was like a cradle rocking softly to a mother's song. He soon fell to sleep, subdued by his dream and what the next day would hold.

Bouncy was rudely awakened by a sudden sharp crack of thunder and the sound of rain beating on the steel roof of the car. Realizing the train had stopped, he

jumped up and shook Sammy, hoping to wake him. He heard the sounds of diesels and men talking outside, and realized they must be in St. Louis.

"C'mon you ol' goat—wake up!"

Sammy rolled over with a grumble and fell back into sleep, only to bolt up when he realized the train had stopped.

"What be goin' on?" he said. "Where are we?"

"Shhhh! I b'lieve we in St. Loui," Bouncy whispered. "At any rate, we got troubles I 'ere men outside da car."

"Well, let's see what we gots out dere," Sammy replied as he quietly sneaked over to the crack in the door and peered around the corner.

"Just them yardmen," he said. "Ain't no thing to worry 'bout."

Sammy returned to his perch against



the wall and smiled. "We gettin' near, ya knows."

Suddenly, the men heard the sound of feet walking on gravel. The men were checking cars for hotboxes and faulty air hoses.

"Shhhhh, 'ere day come, lay low!" Bouncy said.

A sudden stillness filled the wet air. The hobos could hear the men mumbling just outside the car. A clank from the front end indicated they had checked the coupling and would be coming past the cracked door any moment. Bouncy swallowed hard and scrouched down in his little manger. He was afraid of the men, afraid of the train, afraid of paradise. He wanted Texarkana and the waving weeds. Sammy felt his heart pound in his chest. He rubbed his eyes and said a prayer. The men passed.

"Whew, dat was a close 'un," Sammy said, breathing a sigh of relief.

The men waited until the coast was clear, and then made their way over to the door opening to catch some fresh air and sunshine. Bouncy plopped down next to his friend, dangling his feet out the open door.

"Caint b'lieve ya made me do dis," he said. "Startin' ta think I liked Texarkana more dan dis."

"Don't you be a worryin'," Sammy said with a trace of confidence in his voice. "We be dere soon, you'll see what dem hobos has been talkin' bout da last ten years."

"What if dey just makin' story?" Bouncy asked. "What if ain't no better dere dan in Texarkana?"

"We seen a lot of dem hobo types over th' years," Sammy said. "Dey can't all be makin' story over Leroy's town."

"Reckon you right," Bouncy said. "Hope so anyways."

The men sat and watched the trains scuttling about before them in the rail yard. The blinding sun caused them to squint. Sammy leaned back onto the floor and covered his face with his old hat.

THE SUN RECEDED slowly over the tops of the hopper cars on the tracks parallel to the boxcar. They had been sitting for over four hours, with no sign of motion. Bouncy became nervous about the situation, and began his relentless questioning again.

"You sure dis is da right 'un?" he asked. "We ain't goin' to fast, ya knows."

Sammy pulled a soiled railroad timetable from his knapsack and began thumbing through the pages. The letters were Greek to him, but he recognized the numbers and times.

"Quit yer quarrelin' an relax," Sammy said, pulling his pocket watch out to check the time. "Cordin' to dis timetable, we changin' locomotives. Goin' by Illinios Central now."

Bouncy shook his head in disbelief, and jumped down from the car. The gravel ballast beneath his feet gave way and he slipped to his rump, letting out a slur of curses.

"Whataya tryin' ta prove? You tryin' ta git us caught?" Sammy yelled. "Dere's rail men all 'round da place. Shut up an get yer belly up 'ere."

"Aw you shut up," Bouncy retorted. "I'm just lookin' fer da locomotives. I think dere's somethin' wrong 'ere."

Bouncy walked toward the front of the train. Sammy listened as the crunch of the ballast under his friend's feet as he walked away. Distant air horns blasted and locomotives grumbled. With a screech and a lurch, the train two tracks over began to move. Suddenly, Sammy saw Bouncy running blindly for the train, trying to catch up to another green boxcar with an open door.

"What a ya doin'?" he yelled at the top of his lungs. "Dat ain't da right train, Dat ain't da right train!"

Bouncy turned and saw Sammy waving from the Georgia Pacific boxcar. Shoulders slumped, he trudged back to the right train, feeling like a football player who had run the wrong direction

to score a touchdown for the opponent. Sammy helped him back up into the car.

"What be wrong wit you? Why you actin' so funny?"

"Don't rightly know," Bouncy said with a quivering in his voice. "I been gittin' confused lately. Don't know what way is up and what is down. Ain't feelin' tops, neither. I be takin' a knap I think."

For the first time since they had met, Sammy felt a deep concern for his partner. Something was wrong. Something serious. Something that took his mind away from paradise for an instant. He watched as his friend cuddled up in the corner.

The tenseness of the moment was increased with a lurch and a bang. The train was moving! Five hours to Chicago. The world was moving again.

On the high iron of Illinios, freight trains could whiz over the countryside at 70 miles per hour. The smooth rail caused the train to travel quietly, with only a rhythmic swaying. Sammy settled on the wood floor and fell into a deep sleep. He smiled as the thought of paradise loomed in his mind. Paradise-only a few hours away.

A PASSING TRAIN woke both men in the deep of the night. Sammy walked over to the doorway, and squinted his eyes in the wind to look ahead. Nothing but pitch black. He settled back on the floor again, and checked his watch. The train was less than an hour from Chicago.

"Time ta celebrate," he said with a laugh. He reached into his knapsack and pulled out an old bottle of whiskey he had confiscated from a ditch in Texas. He had found the bottle over a year previous, and was saving it for a special occasion. He looked at the label, and tried to read what it said. The dim light available was not enough to illuminate the letters, so he shook his head and screwed off the top.

"Hey, git up. We almost dere. Time ta celebrate!" he called to Bouncy. He heard



no sound.

"What ya dreamin' 'bout? GIT UP!"

Bouncy failed to move. Sammy walked over to his friend and shook his shoulder. Still no response.

"Boy, he must be a sleepin' strong!"

Sammy said as he took another swig of whiskey. "He'll come 'round when we hit da lights."

Sammy sat, drank, smiled, and looked out the doorway. An old house or shed passed every now and then, and he could faintly see the outlines of people in the windows. He watched intently as lights began to appear over the horizon. He knew they were near.

"Hey, look. Day lit da place up fer us!" he said with a laugh. "Bet day cookin' up sum real grub up dere!"

He looked over at Bouncy and, realizing his friend hadn't heard, shook his head and focused his gaze back out the window.

Moments later, he found himself in the middle of the suburbs. He could faintly see outlines of buildings in the distance, and began to wonder when they should desert the train.

"Don't know where we s'pose ta git off,"

he said. "Guess I better start lookin'."

The train had slowed considerably, and the track became rough as the cars lurched over switch points and crossings. Sammy's heart leaped as he saw a column of white smoke wispering up from the brush at trackside ahead.

"Sum a Leroy's boys! We 'ere, we 'ere!" Sammy called. "Git up, ya missin' all da action. We gittin off soon!"

Bouncy had rolled over on his side, but was still fast asleep. The car rolled past the hobo camp, and Sammy yelled down to the men.

"Hey, were da we git off a dis train?" he said. The hobos quickly turned and saw in the faint light Sammy's yead peering from the blackness of the boxcar.

"You better get off soon," one of them yelled back as the boxcar passed. "They got patrols up ahead checkin' the cars!"

Sammy became concerned. He grabbed his things together, and went back to wake Bouncy. His attempts failed again.

"Geez, I ain't never seen a man sleep like dis!" The train had slowed to a stop, and Sammy knew the patrol would be by to check the car soon.

"C'mon! Ifn you don't, I leave witout

chal!"

Sammy shook Bouncy again and again. He rolled his friend over, and noticed how still and cold he was. Positioning a finger under Bouncy's nose, he waited to feel a breath. There was none.

"Oh my GOD!" he said. "No! It can't be! No Bouncy, No, PLEASE!!!"

Sammy turned back to the door in disbelief. He thought it was all a mirage, a dream. Tears filled his eyes as he fell to the floor. He had lost his only friend in the world. The only companion he had ever had.

"Ya wasn't s'posed ta do dat. Why did ya have ta up 'n die on me?" Sammy said between sniffs. "Why?"

He walked back to the open door, and saw the hobos scurrying about in camp. He pulled out his pocket watch. Wiping his eyes, he gazed down at the face. The watch had stopped.

Feeling all he cared about had gone, he looked back up and watched the sun rise. He was in paradise, but the friend he had in Bouncy was really his paradise. The image of the colorful sky was blurred by a tear as he realized Chicago wasn't paradise after all.



Everyone Has a Darin In Their Neighborhood . . . Don't They?

In highschool, everyone has their own little group of friends that do everything together. All groups are basically the same. Each group has leaders, followers, and the stupid guy that everyone keeps around for laughs. In my group Darin was the stupid one that kept us laughing.

Darin is about 5' 10" with naturally orange hair. When he smiled you could see that one of his front teeth was half missing—I think it grew in that way. He also had a *slow, deep* voice with a *slow, deep*, Oklahoma accent. Being from Oklahoma one would naturally assume that he had the I.Q. of an ice cube.

One day while my group was eating lunch, Darin came in and sat down. He asked what seemed to be a logical question. "Who won yesterday, Pittsburg or Miami?"

"Pittsburg," was the reply.

"No they didn't!"

"Yes, they did, Darin. I watched the game!"

"So did I! *Miami* won!"

We all looked at him. Finally he made it all clear when he said: "I'm talkin' about college!"

Later I asked Darin why he asked us if he already knew the answer?

"I was just trying to make conversation."

By Tom Bartkowiak

In social studies class, the topic of discussion was centered around the upcoming 1984 presidential election. Darin said, "Well, I think we need to re-elect Reagan."

Expecting a somewhat logical answer, the instructor asked "Why?"

Being in the National Guard, Darin responded: "My drill sergeant said if we don't, our defense is just gonna go to nothin'! Russian guns can fire 152 rounds a minute and ours only shoots 148!"

Darin did have a brilliant idea one day—or should I say memorable.

"Ya know, I was thinkin'. If I build a space shuttle I could make it to the moon in about two weeks. I figured I'd go down to the junkyard and build it outta old mufflers and a couple old car engines."

Shortly after that, Darin graduated from high school. I said to myself, "I guess that's the end of any new Darin stories." This isn't the first time in my life I've been wrong. More than a year had gone by and I was enjoying dinner at Taco Bell. Almost like a dream come true—or a living nightmare—Darin came in and smiled.

We talked for quite a while. The most memorable part of the conversation was when Darin said, "I've got a motorcycle, but it's in the shop right now."

"Why?"

"I dumped it."

"How?" He had me going!

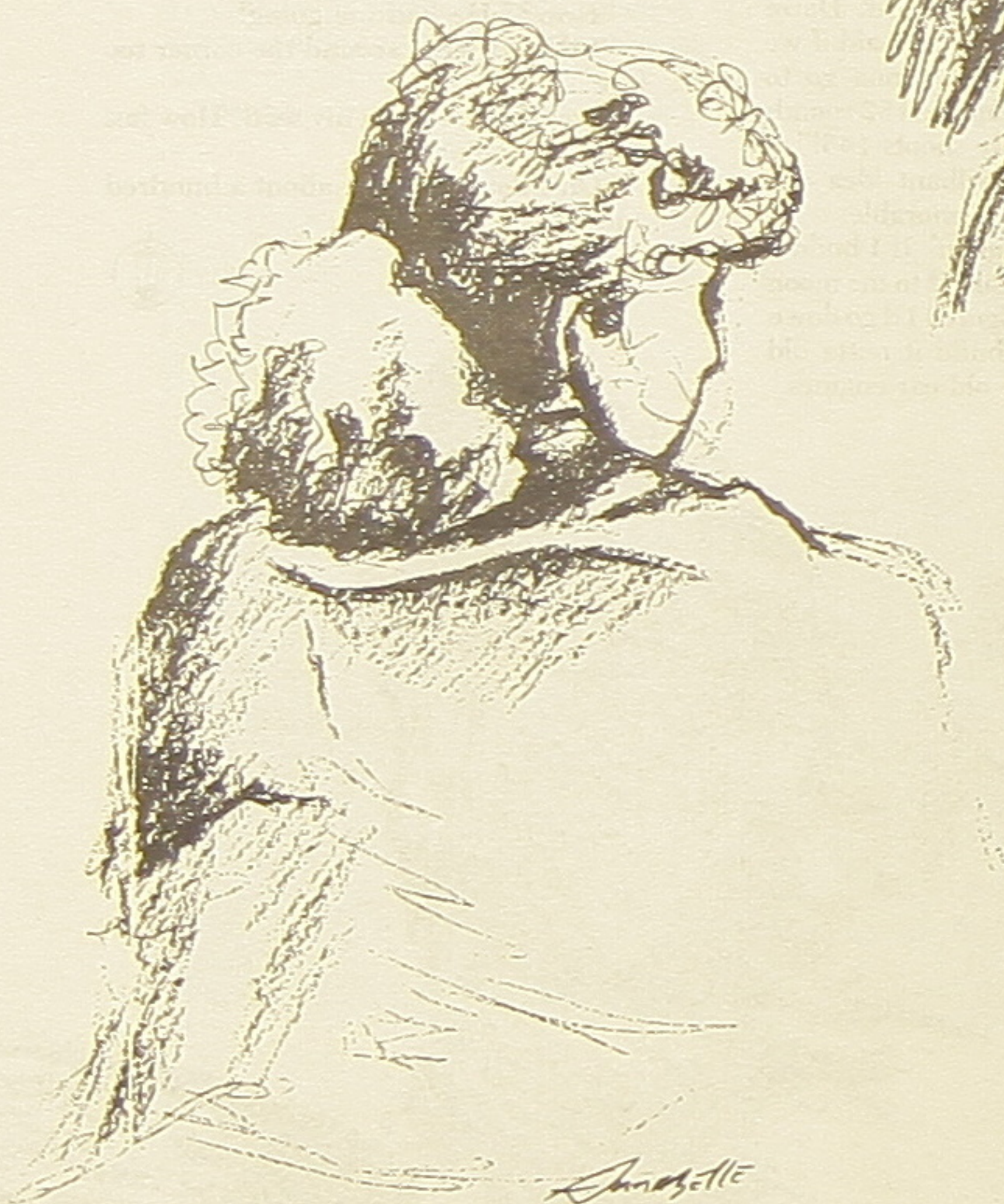
"I think I went around the corner too fast."

I was on the edge of my seat! "How fast were you going?!"

"Oh I don't know. . . about a hundred and five."

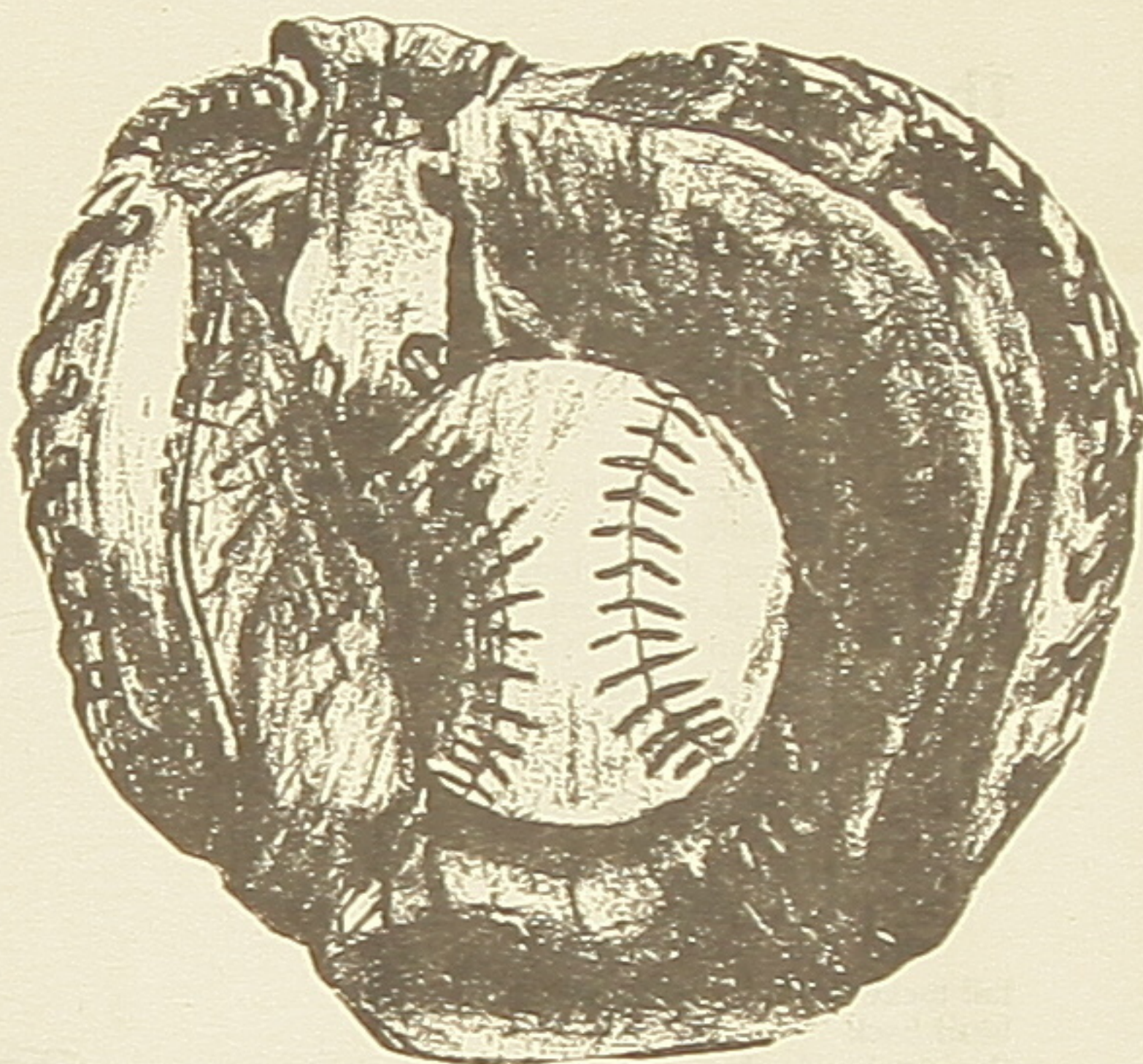
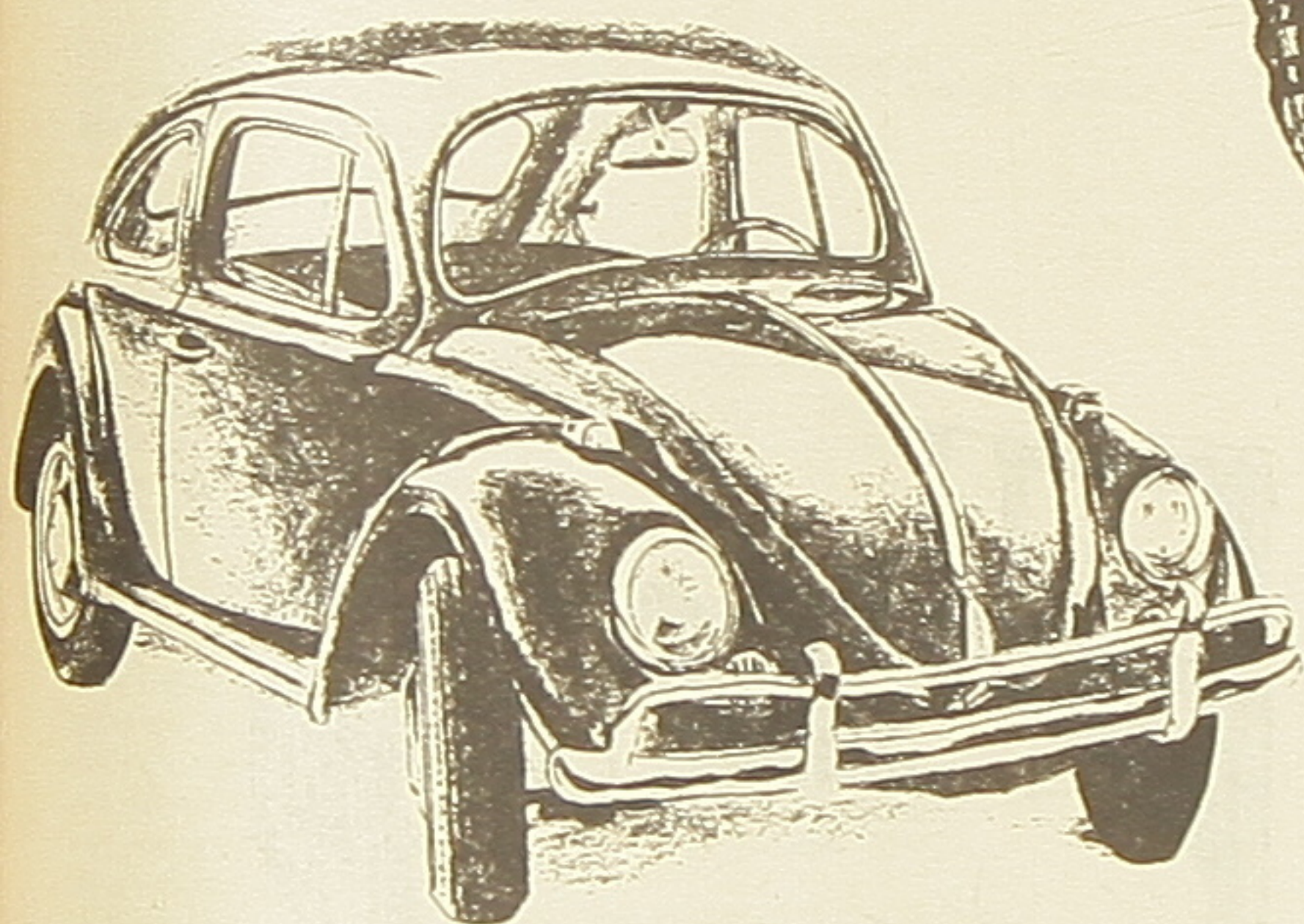


Gallery:
Annabelle Seelye



Gallery:

Eddy Gilbert



The Coyote and the Wind

lone figure
sitting in the full moon
throwing his image
with the golden haze
alone

the breeze
moaning
running dry probing fingers
through his tufted coat
searching
the pale softness of the skin
for the last drop
of lingering moisture
the remnants of sweat
brought out
by the heat of the day
sucked up

tail tucked in
head back
the vagabond releases
his long sad howl
harmonizing
with the moan of the wind

Susan Stone



Linda Shepherd

The Wall

The wall.
short
we talk over it, smile over it.
Tall
we hide behind it, cower behind it.
Can we find a loose stone?

JoAnn Hollis



Simon McCaffery

Carousel

The carousel goes 'round.
I grow dizzy.
Leaping to escape,
standing with the world revolving around me.
Before seeing clearly,
I jump back on,
confident I can control it.
Only to find
that at a faster tempo,
the carousel goes 'round.
Again I escape,
and return for more punishment.
There is no escape.
I am trapped in a whirlpool,
being slowly sucked into unknown voids,
in a world I created.

JoAnn Hollis

The House By Night (Midnight Chant)

By night the house is rolled in starless black,
resting, while we cannot sleep.
After harboring the sunny days events,
its still repose is broken only by our fitful thoughts,
its eclectic dreams
pervaded by our midnight meditations.

(Does it mind that we cannot sleep? The summer's night
air is too heavy and warm; it wraps its torpid arms
around our ticking thoughts, lifting them and drawing
them through empty rooms and shadowed halls, spinning
and spilling them like smoke on the house's languid breath.)

(Does it wish we would still the quiet rustle of our
mind's night wanderings? Grappling with our own unquiet ghosts,
does it mind that we haunt its quiet night?)

In the living room that has become a studio,
transformed as so many other rooms before it have,
my father paints
a long-ago dead city of stone streets set between old
french-shuttered buildings. Black iron balconies permit
the musty river air to sail through and into ancient
light-filled patios masked by sun-lush palms and ferns.
Streets, alleys and buildings
are rebuilt, remodeled and replaced. Horses draw
carriages past darkened shops that tug at some folded memory,
while time-lost faces peer out and whisper in silent tones.
His eyes move restlessly while his deft fingers erect the dead city
from the archives of his memory, wearily(?),
while on the back porch my younger brother welcomes
the inky night, when he can lift up his sleepless gaze
and peer into the star-wilderness with his small telescope.
Tracing the sprawling backbone of night is inspiring and
comforting; infinite and distant,
unimaginable and constant. So distant that he may look on
forever and never arrive, and so there is
no opportunity to look back and see what has been
irised down and away, as I wish I could. But we all
have to go back, and at night is when I crouch over my
battered portable and try. Night brings such dark clarity,
and I know that I will not be able to sleep. Does the house
deplore our restlessness, or does it only wait patiently
for morning?

R. Todd

Old Rocking Chair

Look at that old Rocking chair,
sitting in the corner.
Its seat torn up, its legs coming apart.
Look at its stained red maple wood,
scratched and dented.
And the rug on which it sits,
is ratty and faded.

Melody Cundiff

December Dawn

Night had hung the stars
at the North window of my bedroom
Dawn had rimmed the deep blue sky
with the brown and gold leaves
of a youthful sycamore

The stillness of the early morning
pinned the earth near the stars

All of us,
the night,
the dawn,
the stars,
the tree,

were one motionless being,
quiet though conscious,
Absolute
and
eternal

Dr. Vernon Peterson

Kind is Best I Find

Body Reprieve.
Simple pleasures, become treasures.
Treasures of the mind.
Mind retrieve,
I must contrive to stay alive.
Alive is best I find.
Strive to believe,
that you'll make it
if you want to,
and the stars are
being kind.

Try to Conceive,
a world with naught
to haunt you.
Wouldn't that be kind.
Kind is best I find.

Curtis Steere

Girl in the Burgundy Hat

(Editor's Note: This poem originally appeared in the Nov. 3 edition of AVALON. However, due to poor printing quality, and poorer editing, I feel it deserves a corrected reprinting, along with my sincere apologies.)

As I skirted the crowd, I saw her,
the girl in the burgundy hat.
She moved rhythmically and preached Jesus,
and against lust and learning and sin
(someone called her "sister") and about
being born again.
Today brings a cool, clear sky
with hints of an early fall...but
she's gone, like the banners of homecoming
like the cheers for the queen--hurrah!
like the cheers for the game--rah, rah!

Had I said with my heart, "I love you",
was there a chance you might have stayed?
But I couldn't you see, Sister Cindy,
because of the big parade.
The cold, moist air of autumn
ruined our parade, and your invectives
and scorn for our dreams were worse--
worse than the cold and the rain.
You moved to the beat of your courage,
(unbothered by the rain) to the beat
of your brazen courage, your courage
and your delicate pain!
But you're gone like the cheers
and the hoopla,
never to come again.

Sometimes when leaves are falling,
(the banners will fade again too)
old friends of the heart come calling
and I remember you.
And I remember Jed, the preacher,
dressed in his cheerless black,
(a sobering, funeral black)
but most, I remember you, Cindy,
in your jaunty, burgundy hat;
in your (God forbid that I say fashionable) charming,
burgundy hat, like a specter, a sixties' flower child,
become hawk
in a burgundy hat.

When now I revel in colors
on a halcyon autumn day
and the rah-rahs are gone from the Oval--
I ponder the dream and the way.
And you, how has it gone in the cities,
with the message and cross you bear?
And your courage, it seemed absolute,
how did your courage wear?
And Jed (I recall he was older), your child, and your entourage,
how did your mission fare?



As I skirt the crowds by the Union,
I picture you there by the bell. The students
still love and despise you, like they love
and despise themselves. And as
your voice shreds the damp air again,
and your judgements volley around,
your team of young disciples
surveys the circling crowd,
to rally the circling crowd.
Transfixed and silent they hail you, and
it's "Sister Cindy for queen!"
hail you, deliverer, queen,
delivered-from-the-discos-queen!
But your dictums are mocked and echoed
--hurrahs at the victory scene!

Then I turn to books and to learning,
to the crowds, and to my friends.
We chat in the halls of Southern
about concerts and sports. Amen! Say Amen!
Hail our evangel, amen! But
sometimes in mid-October,
(though we had to ask you to go!)
when the Fall Fiesta is over,
(It wasn't from the heart, you know)
It's then, Sister Cindy, I miss you.
But, I never let it show.
I cross or circle the Oval
(It still gets damp and cold)
to the beat and the hum of the traffic
(The only beat is the traffic)
that hums along Newman Road.
It's then, suddenly like a septe, or
the flash of a swift baton,
your hat marks accents on the air,
for a moment there! there!
and gone!

Dr. Vernon Peterson